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ABSTRACT

A study of the kinds of educational services provided to limited English speaking students, how schools provide these services, factors shaping and guiding the programs, and instructional practices fostering the development of school-related language of bilingual students is summarized. The report is divided into two parts: (1) a descriptive study of the services offered to three bilingual groups (Asian, Spanish-speaking, and Navajo) in three regions of the country, and (2) a study of the language characteristics, educational histories, and educational achievement of a selected group of 150 native Cantonese-speaking elementary school students at the Asian site. The overall study's major conclusions are that: (1) English instruction is critical for the development of reading and writing skills in English, but those students coming to school with a greater command of natural language in English maintain an advantage in the long-term development of those skills; (2) To the extent that native-language instruction is effective in developing native language literacy skills, transfer of the underlying academic proficiency occurs with mastery of the second language; and (3) English oral grammar skill is advanced through exposure to both natural and formal language in English, but oral discourse skill, a formal language factor, will most likely be developed through formal rather than natural language exposure. (MSE)

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LANGUAGE AND LITERACY LEARNING IN BILINGUAL INSTRUCTION

(Contract No. 400-80-0043)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report is one of a series of documents produced for the LANGUAGE AND LITERACY LEARNING IN BILINGUAL INSTRUCTION STUDY by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory:

Descriptive Studies - Asian, Spanish, Navajo: Final Report

Cantonese Analytic Study: Final Report

Language and Literacy Learning in Bilingual Instruction: Executive Summary

Language and Literacy Learning in Bilingual Instruction: A Case Study of Practices and Outcomes

Policy Report: Language and Literacy Learning in Bilingual Instruction

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LANGUAGE AND LITERACY LEARNING IN BILINGUAL INSTRUCTION

Executive Summary

"...students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education." (Lau vs. Nichols, 1974)

Each year schools in the United States enroll thousands of children who come from homes where English is not the primary language spoken by the children and their families. During the past two decades there has been a dramatic increase in the number of such students entering the schools. Many of these children do not have sufficient English skills to participate successfully in classrooms where English is the medium of instruction. In response to the educational needs of these students and to mandates from Congress and the courts that schools consider the student's language and abilities, schools are providing schooling for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students aimed at (1) assisting them in acquiring the necessary English skills to gain access to instruction in the U.S. school systems, and (2) ensuring that their academic skills development progresses at a normal rate for children of their age while English skills are being acquired. However, the nature of the populations to be served and local resources and educational philosophies, as well as federal and state mandates and guidelines, have given rise to a variety of organizational structures and instructional approaches for the delivery of this instruction.

In the face of a rapidly-increasing LEP population, educators and policymakers are seeking information about instructional practices which best foster language development and academic achievement of LEP students. This is a major focus of the Part C Research Agency for Bilingual Education of the U.S. Department of Education. Under mandate from Congress, the Part C Coordinating Committee has sponsored a number of studies, beginning in 1979, organized around three concerns: (a) assessment of national needs for bilingual education; (b) improvement of effectiveness of services for students; and (c) improvement in Title VII program management and operations. One of these studies, Language and Literacy Learning in Bilingual Instruction, was funded through the National Institute of Education to provide information on the kinds of services that are provided to LEP students, how schools provide these services, factors which shape and guide these programs, and what instructional practices best foster the growth and development of school-related language in the second language of bilingual students.

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The study consisted of two strands of research. One was a descriptive study which investigated and described services delivered to three different minority-language groups in three distinct regions of the country. Of the three sites selected for intensive study, one serves multiple language groups (primarily Asian), another serves primarily Spanish-speaking students, and the third consists of two neighboring school districts that serve Navajo students. Data were collected over a two-year period through interviews with a variety of school and commuity people, classroom observations, and review of school documents. The second strand of the research studied the language characteristics, educational histories, and language and literacy achievement of a selected group of 150 elementary school students in the Asian site. Data for this strand of the study included background information on students, descriptions of students' instructional programs, and a variety of measures of the students' current oral language, reading, and writing achievement.

Analysis of the various data sets support the following summary and conclusions:

Descriptive study of Services Delivered

- Over the past two decades there has been a dramatic increase in the number of LEP students enrolling in the U.S. schools. This trend of increasing enrollment of such students is expected to continue over the next several years.

- Bilingual education, which includes English-as-a-Second Language instruction, has been the principal response of schools in their attempt to meet the needs of LEP students.

  Bilingual education services include not only the basic instructional program but also a variety of services needed for the implementation and conduct of the instructional program and for the integration of LEP students into the school system.

- Bilingual education has taken various forms in keeping with the necessity to serve, under diverse conditions, diverse populations with varying and unique educational needs.

  Although there are some features of bilingual education practices in common among the sites studied, these bilingual programs vary in some important ways (e.g., who gets service and for how long; how such services are delivered).

  Variation in these programs reflect (1) special local conditions (e.g., density and distribution of LEP students within the population; number of language groups to be served by the district; role of the non-English language within the wider society); (2) the special characteristics of the populations(s) to be served (e.g., immigrant/refugee vs. long-term residents; limited prior schooling or interrupted schooling vs. previous normal schooling ptterns); and (3) federal,

state, and local policies and philosophies, which in turn are influenced by fiscal realities and availability of human resources.

- School districts have drawn upon a variety of funding sources in addition to ESEA Title VII to support special language assistance programs.

- The practical necessity of providing even minimal services to a rapidly-increasing LEP population has required an enormous expenditure at the local level. At the Asian site, for example, the sudden influx of large numbers to be served in the face of limited fiscal resources resulted in reallocation of existing funds and the adoption of a more realistic district policy, the net effect being a shift away from languge maintenance toward transitional bilingual education in that district.

- No one model of bilingual education can serve all LEP populations under all conditions equally well. Federal and state policies which guide educational practices for minority-language students must be broad enough to allow school districts the flexibility to tailor educational programs to fit the unique needs of their own school populations and the communities which they serve.

- While progress has been made in the academic achievement of minority-language students in recent years, it is evident that special language assistance programs are still needed for LEP students from a variety of language groups as demonstrated by the uniformly-low academic performance of these students on standardized achievement tests.

- Research on and special education programs for LEP students are needed across the entire range of handicapping conditions.

- Use of the non-English home language in the instructional program is seen as having benefits not only for minority-language groups but for society as a whole. It has brought more minority-language adults into an active role in the school and, through inservice training and intern programs provided through school funding, a nucleus of bilingual teachers has been developed in a variety of languages. This professional development of bilingual adults offers the potential for increasing the capabilities of U.S. schools to prepare larger numbers of individuals with foreign language skills and knowledge of foreign cultures (a need expressed by the President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies in 1979). At the same time, such development among adults assists in the integration of minority populations into the mainstream of U.S. society through the expansion of the intellectual and economic base of these communities.

Cantonese Site Analytic Study

The major analyses can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. neither mathematics skill nor the English oral language interactional style measure (a more language-independent index) could be substantially predicted by the literacy independent measures;

2. for foreign first-schooled students, Cantonese reading proficiency was predominantly related to the amount of Cantonese instruction received;

3. the literacy predictors were relatively poor in explaining English oral language discourse skill development, which itself, was relatively poor;

4. both natural and formal language exposure to English were related to English grammar skill development;

5. reading and writing skills in English were predominantly related to the amount of English literacy instruction received, though skill in natural language in English had some influence; and

6. for the foreign first-schooled students, reading skill in English was significantly related to the amount of Cantonese literacy training received, with the same tendency, though not statistically significant, in English discourse and writing skill.

Based on these results, the major conclusions of the study are as follows.

Although the USA first-schooled students consistently outperformed the foreign first-schooled students with respect to English literacy skill achievement, the latter group was, nonetheless, performing relatively well. Given that their average length of English instruction was only about two and a half years, one may expect them to continue to approach the level of competence exhibited by the USA first-schooled students who have had substantially more English instruction.

While no significant positive effects were found for the relatively small amounts of Cantonese literacy training received within the USA first-schooled students, such instruction did not impede English literacy skill development. Thus, although such instruction represents time spent away from direct English literacy skill instruction, it does not show the detrimental effects some hypotheses would predict.

To the contrary, the data show that when Cantonese literacy skills are substantially developed, as in the foreign first-schooled students, such skill is positively related to the development of English literacy skill. Thus, these findings lend support to the interdependence hypothesis which holds that there is a single underlying cognitive/academic

proficiency that is independent of the particular language employed in its development, thereby allowing the transfer of this deeper proficiency (to the extent it is developed) from one language to another regardless of the surface differences between the two languages. The implication for bilingual education is clear: while a given individual is acquiring a second language, development of the underlying cognitive-/academic proficiency can proceed through the first language until the second language has been mastered, at which time, further development of the underlying proficiency can be advanced through either language.

In conclusion the study finds:

1. that English instruction is critical for the development of reading and writing skill in English, but that those students who come to school with greater command of natural language in English, maintain an advantage in the long-term development of these skills;

2. to the extent that L1 instruction is effective in developing L1 literacy skill, transfer of the underlying academic proficiency occurs with mastery of the second language; and

3. that English oral grammar skill is advanced through exposure to both natural and formal language in English, but that oral discourse skill, a formal language factor, will most likely be developed through formal, rather than natural, language exposure.

Information about the study can be obtained from the National Institute of Education and from the following persons from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory who have participated in the study: Wesley A. Hoover, Betty J. Mace-Matluck, Domingo Domínguez